ADDRESS TO THE

WEEKLY SWIFT HALL LUNCHEON

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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BY

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Roger - in John Updike's new novel, Roger's Version - is a professor at a place like this. His "Version" begins:

> "I have been happy at the Divinity School. The hours are bearable, the surroundings handsome, my colleagues harmless and witty, habituated as they are to the shadows. To master a few dead languages, to parade sequential moments of the obdurately enigmatic early history of Christianity before classrooms of the hopeful, the deluded, and the docile - there are more fraudulent ways to earn a living."

That must have been Harvard, although upon the reflective distance of 23 years I conclude that there are more fraudulent ways to spend one's years of graduate education and experience.

Who would have thought, I have been asking myself these past few weeks, that I might be standing here talking to you? And furthermore, what in the world will I say?

The nature of the place, after all, considerably narrows and shapes the field of the possibilities. I can't, for instance, talk about the wonderful network of colleagues, old boy or old girl, with whom I have shared these 23 years of professional practice. there must be another Divinity School graduate serving a Presbyterian Church somewhere - but we haven't found each other yet. (As a matter of fact I had the privilege of working with a Chicago graduate, in Columbus, Ohio - a wonderful professional and good friend, 10 years older than I, so I know there is at least one other.) In any event, the community in which graduation from this place makes me a member is a fairly select group.

In addition, as I thought about what I might say to you, I kept recalling - being haunted by the memory, actually - that when I was a student, I didn't trust people like me. My contacts with real, live, clergy, were terribly limited. And when I went to public worship, which wasn't very often, I was appalled at what I judged to be the banality,

attended classes in Swift Hall and tried to understand the implications of what I had done -

I brought very little to this place but curiosity. I knew three things about the University of Chicago - The Atomic Bomb was planned here, Amos Alonzo Stagg was a famous football coach and Jay Berwanger, a half back in the 1930's was the first Hiesman Trophy Winner, always an impressive fact for trivia aficionados. I had only the vaguest sense of what the right questions were to ask. I did not know the names even, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Among those who showed up here that September 1959, whether one was Tillichian or Niebuhrian - was a matter of major concern, talked about endlessly. It occurred to me that I had better become one or the other. So I walked to a bookstore on 57th Street, a small, hole-in-the-wall that is no longer there. I asked, innocently enough if the proprietor had anything by Niebuhr or Tillich. His response was immediate and strong. "What the hell do you want with that crap?" he demanded to know of me. I stammered something inane which emboldened him further and he launched into a tirade about religion, theology, Divinity School, Alfred North Whitehead. Badly shaken, but wiser by far, I knew that I was in a special place and it wasn't Princeton or Pittsburgh.

One of the things that happened to us immediately was a love affair with the City which has survived and deepened. We loved the lake and the zoos and the Chicago Cardinals - now the St. Louis Cardinals playing at Soldier's Field. In those days you could take a train down on Sunday afternoon and buy a ticket. And the American League Champion White Sox that fall, and Grant Park summer concerts and the museums.

Swift Hall was unlike anything I have experienced - before or since. I recall those first four fall professors:

Old Testament	-J. Coert Rylaarsdam
New Testament	-Robert Grant
Theology	-Joseph Sittler
Church History	-J. S. Whale - a visiting British Theologian who used Church History as a framework to talk about his book on Christian Doctrine.

It was wonderful. I was enthralled. Christianity and scholarship were not two phenomena I had put together before.

I have just returned from Union Seminary and have new sympathy for what it means to live with a glorious past. It is a burden and I don't mean to be guilty of contributing to it here, but they were gloriously vital days for me: Thanks to those professors - and Nathan Scott, Mircea Eliade, Seward Hiltner, Granger Westburg, Marcus Barth, Bernard Loomer, Bernard Meland, James Nichols.

At the end, they gathered those of us who thought we might actually end up in churches into a class, not called "Practical Theology" - that name itself we found revolting - but a class devoted to helping us with

to which they allude.

The Divinity School didn't give me ministerial skills but it gave me a priceless sense of my own life as a quest, a continuing, never-ending process of preparation - for life, whatever it contains, presents, or portends.

Here - I got what I can't find a better word for - than - thirst for understanding. I'm still reading, not nearly as much as I want to, but doggedly, regularly, book after book after book.

Here - I got an appreciation for the body of stuff I don't know: the "thereness" of the information and insights scholars have and I don't have; an intellectual modesty before that which I don't know and others do.

In terms of content and life shaping insight I received here an appreciation for creation - what has been characterized as the theology of creation as well as the theology of redemption. It has resulted in a gift I enjoy and attribute to Swift Hall - a kind of radical amazement and wonder before the sheer miracle of being.

I learned about grace in art and music and literature here, and a sense that whatever the Christian faith is, it relates to, intersects with, is in counterpoint to, or is in dialogue with, the rest of human experience.

I conclude - because of that sense, that it is mighty important that it be discussed, reflected on, argued about and explained in just those places where the arts and sciences and humanities are reflected on learnedly and with scholarly discipline.

St. Paul suggested that in Jesus Christ - or what we here learned to call "the Christ event" God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. Indeed. Incarnational thinking will conclude that - and, I might add, experience it. However, there is nothing more foolish in this world than a piety that is not humble before and conversant with all the wisdom of God's world which is available to us.

And so I wish you would turn out a few more preachers. I think the world needs the church - and I think the church needs the kind of people you have made in the past - even if there are only a few of us.

In fact, it occurs to me that a few of us are probably all any institution - particularly the church - can stand.